

**N**ationally, the average population age 65 and older is 13 percent. The following states have the highest percentage populations age 65 and older:

- Florida – 17.3 percent
- West Virginia – 16 percent
- Maine – 15.9 percent
- Pennsylvania – 15.4 percent
- Iowa – 14.9 percent
- Kentucky ranks 30<sup>th</sup> with 13.3 percent of the population age 65 and older. ■

them alone in a home they've shared for decades. Sometimes their children and grandchildren leave home in search of further education and better career opportunities. Regardless of the situation, elderly individuals living on their own have unique needs that can affect their relationship with local law enforcement.

In Kentucky, 2010 census information designates Lyon County as holding the highest population percentage of people age 65 and older. This comes as no surprise to the Eddyville Police Department. A city of only about 1,500 residents, which nearly triples to around 4,000 in the summer months, Eddyville features several communities that are almost exclusively populated by senior citizens, Eddyville Lt. Jaime Green said. The Eddyville Police Department sits right in the middle of a housing authority with a large number of elderly residents. Officers have a great working relationship with the housing director and the agency has a key to every residence in the housing area.

"If we have any kind of medical emergency, we can take the key and open the door instead of kicking in the door or breaking out a window to get inside the home," Green said. "Many of our residents will tell us, 'If something happens to me, my (phone) list is in my cabinet, or my meds are in here.' We go with EMS on calls and [that information] is great for us and saves them trouble, too."

"We get out and know the public and find out who they are, what their needs are and what they are lacking," Green continued. "You learn who they are, who they are related to."

Knowing how to quickly get to and help the aging members of their community is

imperative to those who don't have family close by to check on them and make sure their needs and concerns are met. But beyond ensuring their health needs and demands are met, there also is a social and emotional need that is left unfulfilled because of the loneliness that comes with isolation.

"Sometimes they just want someone to talk to," said Eddyville Officer Brooks Dixon. "Their family doesn't come over. That's what we're here for. When you live in a community that has a lot of elderly people, that is part of your job."

Green agreed, remembering one woman, during her time with the Louisville Police Department, who called the police department every night just because she wanted someone to talk to.

"Sometimes our elderly people just need an hour or 30 minutes to talk to someone," Benton's Watwood said. "No matter what the problem is, it is huge to them at the time."

"Policing in Benton is just a little bit different than policing in Louisville or

Lexington," he added. "We are blessed that we have the extra time to stay on a call. We go in and we take care of the call, get the information we need, and then they might want to talk. If we aren't busy and don't have to go, we are blessed to be able to sit down and talk. It takes a little longer to do the job, but everybody leaves happy and everybody is satisfied with the end result."

Not only do seniors want to talk, they want to know they are being listened to as well.

"A lot of times, senior citizens just want to be heard, want to know that not only are you listening to them, but you are hearing them and understanding their needs," Watwood said. They want to know and be comforted that you will listen to them and you appreciate them."

"It's a much slower pace and more personal experience for policing," added Benton Officer Stephen Sanderson.

In general, law enforcement officers must exhibit a great deal of patience no matter what age group they are interacting with, but with seniors they tend not to give the information as fast, Green said.

"You have to decipher the phone calls on what it is they are calling about and what they are saying the problem is," she said. "You have to have the patience. You treat them just the same — not any different — but if you listen to them, you'll find that they may or may not have a crime that's been committed." >>

► Benton Police Chief Tracy Watwood takes pride in serving a community with a high senior citizen population. He understands the needs of his community members and he and his department strive to provide the best service they can.

PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

